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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [OTRA](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [SO](#)
SUBJECT: SOMALIA - TRAVEL TO HARGEISA, SOMALILAND

Classified By: Somalia Unit Counselor Bob Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Embassy requests permission for a member of its Somalia Unit to join a UN or other international community-organized, one-day trip to Hargeisa, Somaliland, at the next reasonable opportunity. A volatile security situation has meant that U.S. government representatives have not visited Somalia since September 2008. The lack of access to Somalia forces the Embassy's Somalia Unit to rely completely on contacts with Somalis transiting Nairobi; meetings with members of the Somali, Nairobi-based diaspora; and telephone calls to contacts in Somaliland in order to track events and to execute USG policy there. At the same time, third-country diplomats and international organization representatives travel frequently to Somaliland and often spend days at a time or are permanently based there. Our more energetic engagement with the Somaliland election process, where the incumbent President seems intent on over-staying his welcome, is necessary if longer-term USG policy goals for that region are to be achieved. Although security challenges exist, regular travel to Hargeisa by UN and other-country embassy and NGO representatives suggests that they can be overcome. Any trip to Somaliland would be prepared in close consultation with Embassy's Regional Security Office and would rely on the spadework of the UN's Diplomatic Security Service, which carefully monitors security developments in Somaliland because of the number of UN personnel who are resident there and who travel regularly to Hargeisa. End summary.

Engagement with Somaliland

¶2. (C) The USG has been heavily engaged in the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland, where the incumbent President seems intent on postponing the presidential elections, or at least on holding them on his own terms. The President's machinations have drawn much protest from the two major opposition parties, from the Somaliland Council of Elders (the Guurti), and from the Somaliland public. Because Somalia Unit representatives have not traveled to Somaliland since September 2008, our efforts to shape the outcome of the current strife have been necessarily limited to telephone calls, press releases, meetings with Somalilanders in Nairobi and Washington, and ultimately unsatisfactory efforts to work with and through other intermediaries. All of these means are less effective than direct engagement with the President and other key Somaliland players.

¶3. (C) Somaliland is less turbulent than Mogadishu but nevertheless security challenges must be negotiated. Somaliland and neighboring Puntland saw near-simultaneous suicide bombings on October 29, 2008, and al-Shabaab representatives are present in both regions. Nevertheless,

members of the international community, including third-country embassy representatives, travel frequently to Somaliland and often stay in its capital, Hargeisa, for days at a time. In addition, there is a significant international NGO and UN expatriate permanent presence in Somaliland and Puntland. The UN, for example, currently has the following numbers of expatriates in Puntland and Somaliland. (The numbers in parentheses are the number of temporary UN expatriate employee slots at each location.):

- Hargeisa, Somaliland: 32 (5)
- Bossaso, Puntland: 20 (5)
- Garowe, Puntland: 10 (5)
- Galkayo, Puntland: 8 (2)

14. (C) We believe that we can better leverage our management of the political process in Somaliland if we can more directly engage with key players instead of painstakingly attempting to piece together what is happening there from chance meetings and intervene over often-unreliable telephone lines. Our presence, however brief, in Hargeisa would also serve as evidence of serious USG engagement and no doubt aid opposition parties as they attempt to move President Riyale to election day. The Somaliland President has probably been emboldened in his effort to run roughshod over the election preparation process in part by the failure of a USG representative, in person, to underscore the seriousness of our concerns about his Administration's conduct. Continued skirmishing around the election in Somaliland could lead to a violent stand-off; something, given the years of chaos to the south, that we should do our utmost to avoid.

15. (C) Carefully-prepared, but ultimately regular travel to

Somaliland is key to making our energetic engagement there count for more than it does now. Any proposed trip would be prepared in close consultation with Embassy's Regional Security Office and would rely on the advice of UNDSS, which carefully monitors security developments in Somaliland because of the large number of UN personnel who are resident there and who travel regularly to Hargeisa.

RANNEBERGER